

FIRSTFRUITS

*"Yet already we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, and have we not also other reasons for rejoicing?
For we are drawing near to the One we love, and not only are we drawing near—we even have
some slight feeling and taste of the banquet we shall one day eagerly eat and drink."*

- St. Augustine, Sermon 21, 1-4

*Sharing with You the Blessing of
our Convent Expansion Building*

"Let us love, because He first loved us."

For how should we love, except He had first loved us?

By loving we became friends:

but He loved us as enemies, that we might be made friends.

He first loved us, and gave us the gift of loving Him.

We did not yet love Him: by loving we are made beautiful...

But our soul, my brethren, is unlovely by reason of iniquity:

by loving God it becomes lovely.

What a love must that be that makes the lover beautiful!"

- St. Augustine, Homily IX on the Epistle of St. John, no. 9

"Saint Augustine" (detail)
by Phillipe de Champaigne, 1602-1674
(The Ahmanson Gifts,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991)



*"Let us allow ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit,
let us allow Him to speak to our hearts and tell us this:
that God is love, that He is waiting for us, ...He loves us as a true Father..."*

[Pope Francis, Wednesday General Audience, May 8, 2013]



**"IF THE LORD
DOES NOT BUILD THE HOUSE,
IN VAIN DO THE BUILDERS LABOR."**
[cf. PSALM 127:1]



Photo courtesy of Mrs. Angelina Hudson

*"Thank you to all of you,
and, of course, let us praise the Lord;
without Him,
nothing would have been done."*

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress
(from closing thanksgiving comments)

WHAT IS OUR CONVENT EXPANSION PROVIDING FOR US?

- First and foremost, space for more holy vocations... the building, in combination with the existing renovated ranch house, provides living and working space for up to 48 sisters (that is, women who give themselves totally to God in lives of prayer and sacrifice, interceding for the needs of the Church and the world throughout the day and night, all for His honor and glory, and the salvation of souls)
- Second, a healthy sleeping environment... the dormitories on the top floor have replaced the sisters' three used, leaking, deteriorating and damaged modular trailers
- Third, additional means of self-sufficiency... the expansion building contains two approved professional kitchens for future production and selling of our artisan cheeses, as well as our specialty biscotti and jams at venues outside the convent, once the necessary licenses/permits have been received for both operations

Dear Parents, Confreres, Friends, Family and Benefactors,
Laudetur Jesus Christus in aeternum. Amen!

As we continue our pilgrimage in this "Year of Faith," our hearts are overflowing with gratitude for God's blessings, including that of our monastery expansion project. We thank our Heavenly Father for all of you who have helped to make our vision a reality. On Saturday, July 20, 2013, our beloved *Pater Abbas* Eugene J. Hayes, O. Praem., Abbot of St. Michael's Abbey, presided at the blessing ceremony for our new building here at the Bethlehem Priory, consecrating this monastic space to the Lord, and thus transforming it into the sacred. In this edition of *FirstFruits*, we take you on a brief photo tour of the expansion, sharing with you both the physical and spiritual. Not only does the building provide us with much-needed living and working space (we are now in a position to welcome more vocations, with two young women entering this month), the presence of the sacred throughout draws our hearts, minds, and souls ever more deeply to "*the one thing necessary*" [LUKE 10:42]—a closer union with our Beloved Spouse, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Providentially, this brings us to our holy father, St. Augustine, to whom this issue of *FirstFruits* is dedicated, and whose Holy Rule we and all Norbertines are blessed to follow. "*Let us love God above all things, dearest sisters, and then our neighbor, for these are the chief commandments given to us*" [Taken from St. Augustine's *Ordo Monasterii*, in our Order it traditionally introduces his Rule]. Our founder, St. Norbert, great reformer of the canonical life in the 12th century, earnestly desired that his followers return to the *vita apostolica*. He therefore specifically chose this Rule, believing that it captured the authentic way of life of Christ's first disciples as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles—praying together, sharing all in common, striving to be of "one mind and heart" on the way to God. As we recall the precious gift of our cloistered canonical Norbertine way of life, we especially give profound thanks for our *Pater Abbas* and all of our founding fathers of St. Michael's Abbey, who have imparted this rich spiritual heritage to us with unflagging zeal, paternal solicitude and loving fraternal care. Finally, we thank all of you, our dear friends, for your loyal support over the years, including your generous response to our recent appeals. May the Lord bless you with His special graces during the remaining months of this "Year of Faith," entrusting this time with you and Holy Mother Church to Mary, Mother of God, who was proclaimed "*blessed because she believed*" [LUKE 1:45, see *Porta Fidei*, 15].

St. Augustine found God and throughout his life experienced God to the point that this reality—which was above all an encounter with a person, Jesus Christ—changed his life, just as it changed the lives of so many men and women who have the grace to meet Him. Let us pray that God grants us this favor and in so doing allows us to find His peace. [Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Wednesday General Audience, January 30, 2008]

Prayerfully in Christ, Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Augustine, and St. Norbert,

Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., and the Norbertine Sisters

We thank God for the unequivocal witness
Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI
give us of the primacy of prayer:



our Pope by his constant pleas that the faithful pray for him, and our Pope Emeritus by retiring to serve the Church in a hidden life of prayer and contemplation.

"THE MONASTERY,

*with its distinctive architectural form,
is intended to create a space of separation,
solitude and silence, where God can be sought
more freely in a life not only for Him and with
Him, but also in Him alone."*

- Verbi Sponsa, 5

Mother Prioress
receives the
"Certificate of
Occupancy" for
our building

The final
inspection of
our building

cheese-
aging
rooms

mud
room

laundry

vestry

apothecary

dry
storage

basement

infirmary

community
room

milk
kitchen

"garth"

kitchen

chapter
room

refectory

first floor

novitiate dormitory

novitiate

professed dormitory

second floor

donata dormitory

*"Today, we celebrate the blessing of this building. But we also celebrate the blessing of the house of God
which is not made of stone or bricks, but ... of these sisters."* - The Rt. Rev. Eugene J. Hayes, O. Praem. (from closing comments at blessing ceremony)



Blessing of Our Convent Expansion Building

JULY 20, 2013

*"Let us then offer our thanksgiving above all to the Lord our God,
from Whom every best and perfect gift comes. Let us praise His goodness with our whole hearts.
He it was Who inspired in His faithful people the will to build this house of prayer;
He stirred up their desire and gave them His help.
He awakened enthusiasm among those who were at first unconvinced,
and guided to a successful conclusion the efforts of men of good will.
So God, Who gives to those of good will
both the desire and the accomplishment of the things that belong to Him,
is the One Who began this work, the One Who has brought it to completion."*

- St. Augustine, Sermon 336, 1.6



Our Pater Abbas...



The Bakersfield Californian photos by Autumn Perry © 2013.
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"GARTH"
(OR MONASTIC
ENCLOSED GARDEN)

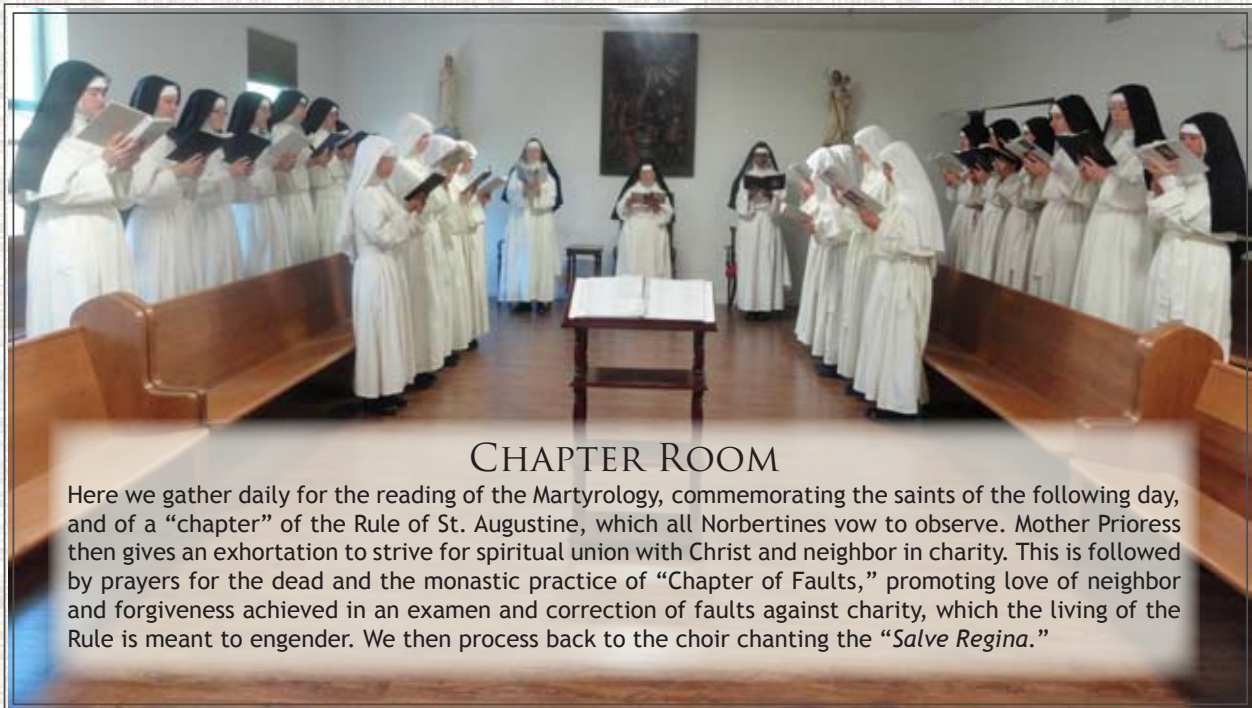
In the monastery,
the enclosed garden
is a symbol of the
undivided heart which the
consecrated woman
must have for her Spouse,
Our Lord.



“HERE ARE THE RULES WE LAY DOWN FOR YOUR OBSERVANCE, ONCE YOU HAVE BEEN ADMITTED TO THE MONASTERY.
THE CHIEF MOTIVATION FOR YOUR SHARING LIFE TOGETHER IS TO LIVE HARMONIOUSLY IN THE HOUSE, AND TO HAVE ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL SEEKING GOD.”

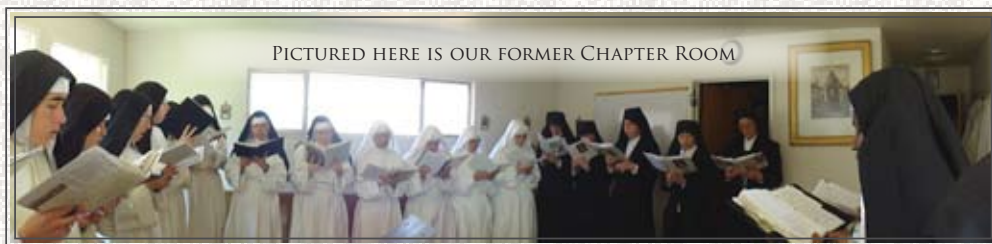
— FROM THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, CH. 6, N. 2 —

“WHOEVER HAS OFFENDED ANOTHER WITH INSULTS OR HARMFUL WORDS, OR EVEN A SERIOUS ACCUSATION, MUST REMEMBER TO RIGHT THE WRONG SHE HAS DONE AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY. THE INJURED MUST REMEMBER TO FORGIVE WITHOUT FURTHER BICKERING. IF THEY HAVE OFFENDED EACH OTHER, THEY SHALL MUTUALLY FORGIVE THEIR OFFENSES FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR PRAYERS.”



CHAPTER ROOM

Here we gather daily for the reading of the Martyrology, commemorating the saints of the following day, and of a “chapter” of the Rule of St. Augustine, which all Norbertines vow to observe. Mother Prioress then gives an exhortation to strive for spiritual union with Christ and neighbor in charity. This is followed by prayers for the dead and the monastic practice of “Chapter of Faults,” promoting love of neighbor and forgiveness achieved in an examen and correction of faults against charity, which the living of the Rule is meant to engender. We then process back to the choir chanting the “Salve Regina.”



PICTURED HERE IS OUR FORMER CHAPTER ROOM

“Peace be to this place, and to all who dwell in it...”

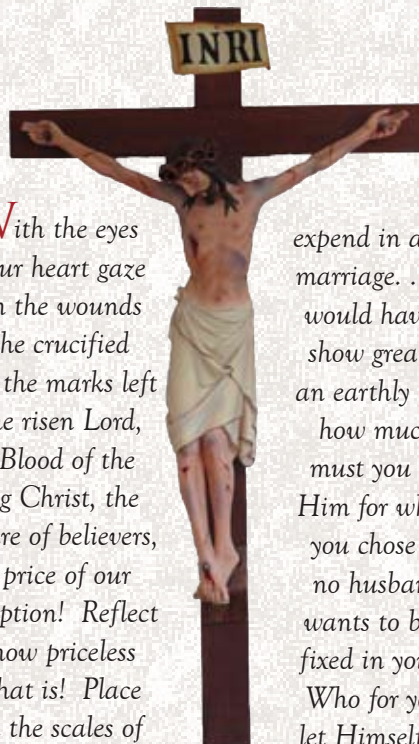
— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



Tehachapi News photo by Gregory D. Cook © 2013.
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OUR CHAPTER ROOM CRUCIFIX

(See the back page for the story on how our monastery came to be its home.)



“With the eyes of your heart gaze upon the wounds of the crucified Jesus, the marks left in the risen Lord, the Blood of the dying Christ, the treasure of believers, the price of our redemption! Reflect on how priceless all that is! Place it on the scales of love and weigh it against any love you might have had to

expend in an earthly marriage. . . . If you would have had to show great love to an earthly husband, how much more must you not love Him for whose sake you chose to have no husband? He wants to be wholly fixed in your hearts Who for your sake let Himself be fixed to the Cross.”

— ST. AUGUSTINE,
HOLY VIRGINITY, 54, 55

“O almighty and merciful God,

Who nourish Your handmaids in this place with bodily refreshments, grant that, by Your benediction, they may receive food and drink with thanksgiving and they may merit to be always secure in Your grace both here and in eternity.”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



— FROM THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, CH. 3, N. 2 —

“LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMARY READING FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END OF THE MEAL... FOOD IS NOT FOR THE MOUTH ALONE; YOUR EARS ALSO SHOULD HUNGER FOR THE WORD OF GOD.”



REFECTORY (OR MONASTIC DINING ROOM)

According to monastic tradition, meals are taken in silence, while a sister reads aloud from Sacred Scripture, a spiritual work, and pertinent news/headlines.



PICTURED HERE IS OUR FORMER REFECTORY

Knowing that Jesus, our Spouse, chose to spend most of His earthly life in a carpenter’s shop, we rejoiced at the opportunity to grow closer to Him in working daily for over five months on many of the interior finishes, furniture, and landscaping of our convent expansion building, as well as renovating portions of the existing ranch house



Hanging in our refectory is this painting of our holy father and founder St. Norbert, inspired by a painting at the former Norbertine Abbey of Floreffe in Belgium.



Original Art by the Norbertine Sisters, Tehachapi

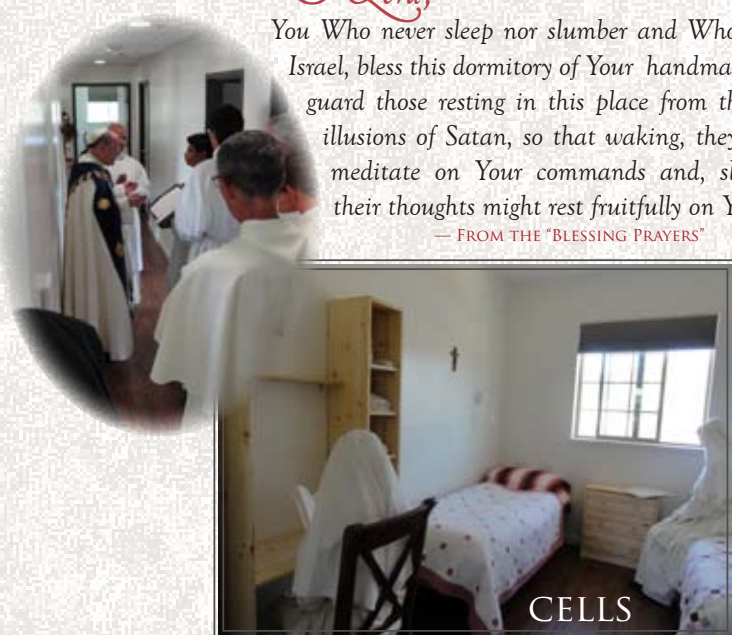
DORMITORIES & NOVITIATE, INFIRMARY & COMMUNITY ROOM

Praying, working, eating, studying, recreating, sleeping...the life of a Norbertine canoness is lived in common

“O Lord,

You Who never sleep nor slumber and Who guard Israel, bless this dormitory of Your handmaids and guard those resting in this place from the false illusions of Satan, so that waking, they might meditate on Your commands and, sleeping, their thoughts might rest fruitfully on You.”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



CELLS

Each of our shared cells are furnished with two sets of simple wooden furniture designed and built by our sisters

NOVITIATE



In order to provide for their special needs, during their years of initial formation young sisters are under the direction of the novice mistress, and they work, study, and recreate separately from the professed sisters

— FROM THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, CH. 5, NN. 1, 4, 11 —

“KEEP YOUR CLOTHES IN ONE PLACE UNDER THE CARE OF ONE OR TWO...

JUST AS A SINGLE STOREROOM FURNISHES YOUR FOOD, SO A SINGLE WARDROBE SHOULD SUPPLY YOUR CLOTHING...

YOU ARE TO KEEP CLOTHES YOU ARE NOT WEARING AT THE PRESENT TIME IN ONE PLACE UNDER COMMON SUPERVISION. ...

THE SUPERIOR DECIDES HOW OFTEN YOUR CLOTHES ARE TO BE LAUNDERED,

LEST AN INORDINATE DESIRE FOR CLEAN CLOTHES INWARDLY STAIN YOUR SOUL. ...

THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR CLOTHES AND SHOES SHALL PROMPTLY HONOR THE REQUEST FOR EITHER, WHEN ANYONE EXPRESSES THE NEED.”

— FROM THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, CH. 1, N. 3 —

“DO NOT CALL ANYTHING YOUR OWN; POSSESS EVERYTHING IN COMMON.”

“O almighty and merciful God,

we beseech Your boundless clemency that You might deign to visit in kindness Your handmaids who lay in this place subdued by weakness...”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



INFIRMARY

COMMUNITY ROOM



For professed sisters' recreation, special occasion meals, etc.

“LET NO ONE WORK FOR HERSELF ALONE, BUT ALL YOUR WORK SHALL BE DONE FOR THE COMMON PURPOSE, DONE WITH GREATER ZEAL AND MORE CONCENTRATED EFFORT THAN IF EACH ONE WORKED FOR HER PRIVATE PURPOSE...

YOU WILL KNOW THE EXTENT OF YOUR PROGRESS

AS YOU ENLARGE YOUR CONCERN FOR THE COMMON INTEREST INSTEAD OF YOUR OWN PRIVATE INTEREST; ENDURING LOVE WILL GOVERN ALL MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE FLEETING NECESSITIES OF LIFE.”



KITCHEN

“O God,

before Whose Face the angels minister and by Whose Will the universe is ruled, in Your clemency You do not disdain also to provide for fragile humanity with necessary sustenance, we humbly beseech You, that You might pour forth abundantly on this workplace that benediction by which You purified a most bitter repast in the herb-filled pot through the hands of Elisha the Prophet.”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



DRY STORAGE

For Kitchen and Gift Shop Inventory

“O almighty and merciful God,

Who is present everywhere, we humbly beseech Your Majesty that Your grace might deign to be present here in this cellar so that every pestilence may be repelled and the abundance of Your blessing copiously poured forth.”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”

“Peace be to this place, and to all who dwell in it...”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



FUTURE* MILK KITCHEN



FUTURE* CHEESE-AGING ROOMS

* Towards the end of construction, we received additional requirements from the government agency for our milk barn and milk house, which we are currently addressing. (Please see the back page for an update.)



ONGOING RENOVATIONS TO THE EXISTING RANCH HOUSE

Moving our Refectory and Chapter Room into the new building has enabled us to expand our Choir (the sisters' chapel) and Scriptorium/Library

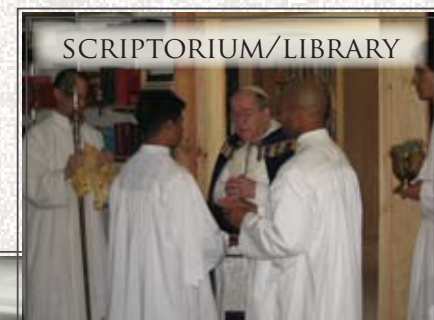
— FROM THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, CH. 2, N. 3 —

“WHEN YOU PRAY TO GOD IN PSALMS AND HYMNS, THE WORDS YOU SPEAK SHOULD BE ALIVE IN YOUR HEARTS.”

“Bless, O Lord,

this library of Your handmaids and all who come herein, that whatever is read or written by them of the divine Scriptures here, they might grasp in understanding and carry out in works.”

— FROM THE “BLESSING PRAYERS”



SCRIPTORIUM/LIBRARY

OUR RENOVATED CHOIR



choir

The practice of manual labor — animals, gardening, building, & more — makes a mud room a necessity!



MUD ROOM



LAUNDRY



VESTRY

THE STORY BEHIND
OUR CHAPTER ROOM
CRUCIFIX:

As he walked behind a church in 1967, a man spotted this crucifix in a dumpster with both arms broken. Taking it home, he restored it, built a new cross for it, and hung it in his house. Seeing the crucifix in an antique store in Bakersfield, where it had been since the man's death in 1987, and hearing its story, a friend was moved to donate it to our monastery. Now it hangs in our Chapter Room, a vivid reminder of Our Savior's love.



OUR CURRENT PRESSING FUNDING NEEDS:
OVER \$1 MILLION FOR

EXPANSION PROJECT (MILK PARLOR MODIFICATIONS) & LAND

We are grateful to all of you who are helping to make our convent expansion project a reality, and we thank you in advance for your prayers and material help with our current pressing funding needs, for which we will have to raise over \$1 million:

1. Toward the end of construction, in November and late March, we received additional requirements from the government agency for our milk barn and milk house (not included in our budget-goal); we are in the process of engaging a dairy engineer/architect to assist us. Thankfully, these requirements have not affected the completion of our convent expansion building or its occupancy, but they do preclude the production of our farmstead and artisan cheeses, an important element of our efforts toward self-sufficiency, until they can be met.
2. The purchase of our land from St. Michael's Abbey (approx. \$1M).

Your tax-deductible* monetary gift, of whatever amount, will continue to make a difference in our lives:

1. Make checks to: "Norbertine Sisters" (Memo: "Expansion Project—Milk Parlor & Land Fund")
2. Donate via PayPal on our website: www.norbertinesisters.org for on-line credit card donations

* We are a 501(c)(3) religious non-profit organization.

SACRED VESTMENTS

If you are interested in purchasing our vestments made by the sisters (BELOW), please contact us at:
(661) 823-1066 or
e-mail at MotherMaryA@aol.com



THE NORBERTINE SISTERS'
MONASTERY GIFT SHOP



Welcome to our gift shop.

Our hours are: 10:00-11:30am & 2:30-5:00pm every day except Friday, when we close at 4:15 p.m.

Our inventory includes religious goods & books; home-made biscotti, jam, honey, & apothecary items; aprons, baptismal baby blankets;

& dried flower, calligraphy & other greeting cards. Ask about our gift certificates & prayer enrollment cards.

- BETHANY GUEST HOUSE -
Sharing with you the Norbertine charism of
prayer and hospitality

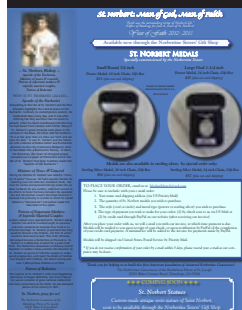


For parents visiting from afar, for those discerning religious vocations, for anyone seeking a time of

more intense prayer and solitude...it's for you.
(Day visits and overnight stays are possible.)

Call now to schedule your visit and for details
(weather, dress, etc.): (661) 823-1066

ST. NORBERT
MEDALS & STATUE



Please see our website, www.norbertinesisters.org, to learn more about the medals (available now) and statue (coming soon) of St. Norbert especially commissioned by the Norbertine Sisters, available through our Gift Shop.

THE NORBERTINE SISTERS'
2013 CHRISTMAS WREATHS

ORDER FOR YOURSELF, OR AS GIFTS FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, EMPLOYEES, CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS, ETC.

FRESH HAND-MADE BALSAM WREATHS

24-inch pre-made rounds with full fresh Balsam (Northern White Fir) pine boughs: 2-3 pounds of balsam greenery, adorned with frosted and regular pine cones, & a large custom-design ribbon hand-made by the sisters

Shipped across the country in specialty wreath boxes

- PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE,
WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG

FOR OUR UPCOMING WREATH FLYER -

Thank you to all who made 2012 our best year ever - over 1150 sold!

A special thank you to the five friends who funded this special issue of our *FirstFruits* newsletter!

To find out more about our cloistered contemplative Norbertine way of life, to make prayer requests, to find out about our vestments, gift shop inventory and hours, or Bethany Guest House, you are welcome to phone (661) 823-1066 or use our email accounts: pray_req@cybersurfers.net or MotherMaryA@aol.com.

(If you do not receive an acknowledgement of your message, please resend it or call.)

Also, please kindly assist us in updating our address and email database by sending us your current information!

Please check www.norbertinesisters.org for the downloadable version of this newsletter and for references.

May God reward you for helping to build this first North American foundation of Norbertine canonesses!